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OACP In The News

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Today's News Briefs:

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People are flocking to Toronto's downtown and outer suburbs — but not in between, census data shows (**Toronto Star**)
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International News:

Police arrest convoy protesters at New Zealand's Parliament (**The Associated Press**)
Global regulators going 'full steam' to tame crypto currency (**Reuters**)
Lawmakers launch 'all levels' probe into Ronald Greene death (**The Associated Press**)

Today's News Briefs:

Despite COVID-19, census shows population grew at fastest rate in G7, topping 36.9M (*Toronto Star*)

Canada's population grew at a faster rate than many of its peers, rising to over 36.99 million on census day last year despite a historic slowdown caused by COVID-19.

Statistics Canada said the national population grew by 5.2 per cent between 2016 and 2021, almost double the rate of any other G7 nation and faster than the preceding five-year stretch.

The agency said the main reason for the slowdown in growth from a historic high to its lowest rate in a century was border restrictions that, while meant to slow the spread of COVID-19, also slowed the pace of newcomers arriving in Canada, who have been, and remain, critical to maintain growth.

Statistics Canada said there were about 1.8 million more people calling the country home in 2021 compared with 2016, with four in every five being immigrants.

Federal immigration plans call for 411,000 new permanent residents this year, rising to 421,000 in 2023. Michael Haan, an associate professor at Western University's sociology department, said those historically high targets would mean the population curve would really take off.

Immigration has been key to driving population growth as the birthrate has declined, but the agency notes that rate in 2021 hit its lowest level of record as part of a notable decline since 2008.

The number of children per woman hit 1.4 in 2020, the most recent year the agency provided, a record low that falls short of the 2.1 mark needed for births to offset deaths, which is linked to maintaining a thriving economy.

Statistics Canada said some of that slowdown might be pandemic-induced, but warned it could get worse in the future. An agency study late last year noted adults under 50 wanted to have fewer children than previously planned.

At this point, Canada isn't headed to a situation where deaths outnumber births like in Italy and Japan — at least within the next 50 years. The key to avoiding that fate is the number of new immigrants who boost population numbers, but also domestic birthrates.

"If you attract immigrants, you're going to grow and if you don't attract immigrants, there's a high chance you're going to eventually go into population decline," said Doug Norris, chief demographer at Environics Analytics who spent 30 years at Statistics Canada, including work on the census.

The pandemic is expected to have an effect on census results, although experts suggest the country may have to wait a few years to learn whether COVID-19 caused a permanent or temporary shift in the portrait of the population.

"We'll need to monitor trends in the coming years, probably until census 2026, to definitely draw a conclusion," said Laurent Martel, director of Statistics Canada's centre for demography.

"Certainly, the pandemic has accelerated some of these trends that we were already seeing in the data."

The first findings released Wednesday from the 2021 census, taken against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, showed that the Maritimes grew faster than the Prairies for the first time since the 1940s, largely on the back of immigration. Newfoundland and Labrador was the lone province to see a decline.

The largest share of the population still resides in Ontario. But to its west, British Columbia watched its slice of the population pie grow and the Prairies saw its share rise to its highest level since 1951.

To Ontario's east, Quebec's share of the population continued to decline, as did the Atlantic provinces.

Immigrants typically settle in urban centres. The largest cities got bigger between 2016 and 2021 with Edmonton and Ottawa cracking the one-million mark, and the number of cities with more than 100,000 people growing to 41 from 35. Rural areas, too, grew, albeit at a far slower pace than their metropolitan cousins.

"It continues to show that we need to be planning our urban centres better to make them more livable, make them more walkable, and make them more connected, at the same time make them more affordable," said Dan Huang, president of the Canadian Institute of Planners.

"That is the paradox of planning, I guess, and policy-making in the country, which there's no easy answer to."

Statistics Canada plans to add more flourishes to the paint-by-numbers exercise as the year rolls on to reveal more information about changes among Indigenous populations, and working during the pandemic.

The next release date is scheduled for late April when Statistics Canada will outline census findings on how the country has aged, types of housing and, for the first time, gender identity.

People are flocking to Toronto's downtown and outer suburbs — but not in between, census data shows (*Toronto Star*)

Downtown Toronto's population has soared in the last five years — despite a pandemic-era slump — and the outskirts of the GTA are booming. New data shows the spaces between, however, haven't kept pace.

Encircling Toronto like a halo, areas such as Milton, New Tecumseth and East Gwillimbury were among the fastest growing municipalities in the country (among those with populations over 5,000) between 2016 and 2021, new Statistics Canada data shows, with population increases of 20.7, 28.3

and 44.4 per cent respectively — and East Gwillimbury taking the top spot across the country.

Among Toronto's distant suburbs, which includes any part of the census metropolitan area at least 30 minutes' drive from the city core, StatCan found populations grew by 9.4 per cent. It's a surge dwarfed only by the continued boom downtown, which saw a five-year population jump of 16.1 per cent, despite growth slumping to 0.4 per cent between July 2020 and 2021.

It's a different story in the middle. In the areas located less than 10 minutes' drive from downtown, StatCan found the five-year increase to be just 1.4 per cent. Within 20 minutes' drive of the core, populations grew by 1.7 per cent. And in what are known as the intermediate suburbs, which include parts of Mississauga and Markham within 30 minutes' drive, the change was 0.4 per cent.

"The differences are striking," said Karen Chapple, director of the University of Toronto's school of cities.

She cautioned the peculiarities of a pandemic census could have an impact on the data — offering, as an example, households hunkering down in a secondary property such as a cottage during COVID-19, or students who might normally be on a school campus staying at home.

But overall, she and other experts believe that Wednesday's data illustrates a continuation of long-standing trends — from the pursuit of affordable homes pulling more households further out of Toronto, to new housing developments clustering in Toronto's dense downtown.

"We haven't really done a great job of increasing housing affordability and availability in those areas near downtown, where people would like to live but can't afford to buy," Chapple said. She sees the booms in further suburbs as indicative of a "drive-until-you-qualify" approach.

"People are moving out there because that's where you can find more affordable housing — because the core is in a housing crisis. That's ongoing ... that's the decade-long trend."

David Hulchanski, a housing expert with U of T, isn't surprised by the data, saying it's a trend that's emanated outward for half a century. While parts of suburban Toronto such as Etobicoke and North York have seen slower growth in the last five years, those areas grew rapidly in the 1950s, he said. In the '60s, that growth widened out to Peel and York Region.

"The outer suburbs have always offered newer and larger housing options at a lower price, in exchange for distance from the central area," Hulchanski wrote in an email, noting that for some households, securing newer housing — in newer suburbs — was a priority.

He suggested that in-between areas may be less attractive to developers, as they neither offered the lure of living in a major hub that came from building downtown condo towers, nor the promise of extra space in a further suburb.

"If transit was dramatically improved in the other areas this would make a difference. But that requires both investment and urban planning."

While suburbs such as Oakville, Brampton and Pickering have seen sizable population hikes in the last five years — 10.3, 10.6 and 8.1 per cent respectively — Mississauga stands out as an anomaly, with StatCan reporting a population drop of 0.5 per cent between 2016 and 2021.

Diana Petramala, senior economist for Ryerson's Centre for Urban Research and Land Development, noted Mississauga had historically been a landing spot for new immigrants. But she believes the suburb has become increasingly inaccessible to younger people, with millennial-aged households looking to other areas such as Durham or Simcoe if they wanted to buy a home.

As those areas grow, both Chapple and Petramala believe transportation is a major question.

"You're going to see a lot more traffic if people start going back to the office, if the jobs don't follow the population growth," Petramala said — while noting that in some cases, transit expansions may have aided surging populations by making suburban areas more accessible.

"The concern would be if this trend continues, and there becomes a sort of ring of subcentres around the (Toronto area), are we going to have to do a massive expansion of the highway system?" Chapple asked, noting that came with both a financial and environmental cost.

While the new data shows three quarters of the growth in recent years in Toronto's census metropolitan area, which stretches as far as Lake Simcoe, Burlington and Clarington at its edges, was in the "distant" suburbs, the data also shows a country that's becoming increasingly urban — with the downtown areas of major cities growing faster than before.

While urban centres Canada-wide saw a 6.1 per cent population increase overall between 2016 and 2021, the new data shows that growth in their downtown areas was far higher, at 10.9 per cent.

It's a marked shift, the agency noted, from the last census — which found downtown populations growing slower than overall metropolitan areas. It's a trend, StatCan believes, is attributable to a number of factors — from city efforts to boost density to the continued pull of living near jobs.

Petramala believes the concentration of rental housing is also a factor, with more households renting for longer, as Hulchanski and Chapple pointed to the numerous condos rising in the core.

"That's where the new housing has gone," Petramala said, noting it was more difficult to put density into other parts of the city, such as its "yellowbelt" neighbourhoods — a term for the bulk of Toronto's residential areas that are zoned for detached and semi-detached homes.

But overall, Chapple sees the growth in downtown areas as cause for excitement.

"We've shown that if we can increase housing supply, then we can bring people back."

Project Waffle results in seizure of \$2.3 million in cocaine, three arrests (TBNewsWatch.com)

The execution of warrants at several properties throughout the city and

Shuniah has resulted in the seizure of crack and powder cocaine worth more than \$2.3 million, and while it is one of the most significant busts in the history of the Thunder Bay Police Service, the lucrative drug trade in the region means more dealers and more drugs will come to replace it.

"We arrest people steady and there is a steady flow of people coming to replace them," said Det. Insp. John Fennell with the Thunder Bay Police Service. "We are trying to put a dent in that. This is substantial and will put a dent for a short period of time in the drug sales here."

On Wednesday, the Thunder Bay Police Service revealed the results of Project Waffle, a seven-month investigation that began in August 2021 and led to the execution of search warrants at seven properties and three arrests on Friday, Feb. 4.

Thunder Bay Police Service chief Sylvie Hauth said it is one of the most significant seizures in the service's history and was only made possible by the dedication and hard work of the members.

"They along with other law enforcement partners continue to show that determination and hard work pay off," she said.

"We have never faced a greater threat to public safety and community safety and well-being as we face today. The burden on this community and our neighbourhoods is very high. The enforcement efforts will continue but we cannot sustain this fight without tangible supports from the province and the federal government."

Properties were searched on Wentworth Crescent, Sleeping Giant Parkway, McKellar Street South, Rosedale Avenue, Clearwater Way, Jean Street, and Sunnyside Beach Avenue in Shuniah.

The searches led to the seizure of crack and powder cocaine with an estimated street value of more than \$2.3 million, along with \$470,000 in cash, four handguns, and several vehicles.

Three people were taken into custody, including Sean Sikking, 27, of Shuniah and formerly of the Greater Toronto Area, who is charged with several firearms offences, possession of cocaine for the purpose of trafficking, and possession of property obtained by crime over \$5,000.

Tanner Douglas Hunt, 25, of Thunder Bay but formerly of Toronto, is also facing several firearm charges, as well as the possession of cocaine for the purpose of trafficking and possession of property obtained by crime over \$5,000.

Andre Gagne, 46, of Thunder Bay was also arrested and charged with the possession of cocaine for the purpose of trafficking and possession of property obtained by crime over \$5,000.

All three appeared in court on Friday, Feb. 4 and were remanded into custody with a future court date.

According to Det. Sgt. Dan Irwin, who oversees the drugs, guns, and gangs unit with the Thunder Bay Police Service, most of the properties searched are known as stash houses, where drugs are processed and hidden, and not the result of home takeovers.

"Not to get into details, regarding individuals, to make it hard for us to detect them, they are going to use more houses," he said. "We have all these rules

to follow as police, they don't. We have to do the leg work."

Project Waffle was a joint effort between the Thunder Bay Police Service and the Ontario Provincial Police and received assistance from the Sault Ste. Marie Police Service and Peel Region Police Service.

It was funded by the provincial government through Criminal Intelligence Service Ontario. Members of the Thunder Bay Police Service could not comment on the amount of funding, but Fennell said an investigation like Project Waffle involves countless hours and many members to complete.

"Outside funding is huge to help our community," he said. "Police budgets take a hit. Even though it's a very lucrative capture, this is not our money to use. We give it to the province after. We need provincial funding and federal funding. We haven't had much."

The city of Thunder Bay, like many across the country, is also facing an opioid crisis along with an increase in gang activity and violent incidents involving firearms. In 2021 alone, police responded to 354 overdoses, of which 94 were fatal.

"To put this in perspective, this seizure alone has prevented more than 15,000 doses from being sold in our city or sister communities around us," Fennell said. "We cannot measure how many lives this may have saved from overdoses."

"I think Thunder Bay, as we know, has an opioid crisis as well as many social problems with the high addiction rate," Irwin added. "When we remove something to this extent, I know it's not going to solve the problem, but it is going to make an impact. It could possibly make one dealer thinking of coming here or becoming a drug dealer not come to Thunder Bay."

Irwin said he could not speculate as to whether the seizures and arrest associated with Project Waffle are related to criminal activity by Southern Ontario gangs.

"I would say it's all intertwined," he said. "Drugs, guns and gangs, human trafficking, it all goes hand in hand. I can't speculate because the investigation is still ongoing."

However, such a large bust can also have a negative impact for police because it tips off criminals involved in the drug trade to the information police have.

"The new technique we are seeing as of late is all of these different houses. What they are doing is putting stash houses in different places," Fennell said.

"They don't have one particular drug house and dealing out of that over and over because we are hitting those fast and hitting those hard and making those arrests. So they are moving around as fast as we are able to figure out where they are."

The Project Waffle investigations remain ongoing. Police also recently launched [Project Reveal](#) as a way to educate community members on how they can assist police with information relating to drug trafficking in their neighbourhoods.

Anyone with information that could assist are encouraged to contact police at 684-1200 or submit tips anonymously through Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477 or online at www.p3tips.com.

Davidson calls for county to consider use of automated speed enforcement (*The Wellington Advertiser*)

Mapleton Mayor Gregg Davidson wants the county to study the idea of automated speed enforcement (ASE).

At the Jan. 27 Wellington County council meeting, Davidson introduced a notice of motion that, if approved, would direct county staff to conduct a cost/benefit analysis and facilitate discussions with lower tier municipalities on the topic and bring a report to the county's roads committee.

Davidson pointed out the province has allowed the use of automated speed enforcement since 2017 "to address ongoing issues with speeding in school zones and Community Safety Zones."

Automated speed enforcement uses a camera and a speed measurement device. If a vehicle exceeds the posted speed limit in an ASE-enforced area, the ASE system captures an image that is stored and reviewed by a provincial offences officer.

The ticket, which contains a digitized copy of the image and an enlargement of the plate portion, is mailed to the registered plate holder. Upon conviction, the only penalty is a fine – no demerit points are applied.

Noting speeding is a major concern of county residents, Davidson stated, "evidence-based research provincially, nationally and internationally indicates that the use of automated speed enforcement reduces the overall speed on affected roadways and therefore has potential to enhance road safety."

Davidson, a former police officer, noted the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police has called for "the expansion and mandated use" of automated speed enforcement.

Davidson's notice of motion indicates the cost benefit analysis should consider systems utilizing both permanent camera locations and rotating cameras through community safety and school zones.

It also calls for staff to be directed to lead discussions with Wellington County municipalities "as partners in the local implementation of automated speed enforcement."

Warden Kelly Linton said the notice of motion would be considered at the next county council meeting on Feb. 24.

Niagara men sentenced to time served in relation to police investigation into drug trafficking (*Welland Tribune*)

A man arrested in connection with a 2021 shooting in downtown Niagara Falls that left a man with life-threatening injuries has pleaded guilty to unrelated drug charges.

Nicholas Keighan-Scordino appeared in Ontario Court of Justice in St. Catharines Wednesday and pleaded guilty to two counts of possession of cocaine for the purpose of trafficking.

The 24-year-old was sentenced to time served, based on the time he had spent in pretrial custody, followed by a 12-month conditional sentence.

His cousin, Sean Keighan, pleaded guilty to a charge of possession of proceeds of crime. The 31-year-old also received a sentence of time served and was placed on probation for three months.

"Trafficking in any kind of hard drugs, profiting from that, is a significant offence," Judge Fergus O'Donnell said at sentencing. "It has a significant impact on the community, generally, and on the specific individuals who are vulnerable to addiction for a variety of reasons.

"Their quality of life and even the duration of life can be drastically impacted. That's a pretty sad and common reality in Niagara, and has been for quite some time."

In August 2017, court heard, Niagara Regional Police executed warrants at two homes in Niagara Falls and seized a quantity of cocaine, cannabis and shatter.

Also seized during the investigation was just less than \$90,000 in cash and items related to drug trafficking including digital scales and debt lists.

In May 2018, court was told, police searched a Niagara Falls home and seized a quantity of cocaine as well as more than \$3,000.

Keighan-Scordino also faces weapons-related charges in relation to a shooting in downtown Niagara Falls.

Police were called to the area of Chrysler Avenue and Jepson Street in January 2021 and found a 25-year-old man suffering from a gunshot wound. The man was airlifted to an out-of-town hospital with life-threatening injuries.

That case remains before the courts.

Families dealing with loved ones addicted to drugs, is the subject of a new private members bill (*Bay Today*)

"Northern Ontario has been one of the hardest-hit parts of the country by the opioid crisis," claims an NDP news release.

NDP MPs Charlie Angus (Timmins- James Bay) and Carol Hughes (Algoma-Manitoulin – Kapuskasing) are supporting a private member's bill that would help hundreds of families dealing with loved ones who use or are addicted to drugs.

If passed, the NDP's bill would decriminalize drug possession for personal

use and expand access to crucial harm reduction, treatment and recovery services.

"Practically everyone living in northern Ontario has been touched by the opioid crisis in some way," said Angus. "It is unthinkable that the Liberal government would leave people to suffer for so long. We clearly need a new approach to tackling this crisis. It's time the Liberals listened to the experts and took a health-based approach to save lives."

Last year, the cities of Vancouver and Toronto and the province of BC applied to the federal government for the decriminalization of drugs for personal use, a step that was recommended by the Liberal government's own Expert Task Force on substance use and supported by law enforcement organizations including the Canadian Association of Police Chiefs says the release.

"It is time we stopped treating people who are addicted to drugs as criminals, and got them the help they need," said Hughes. "How many more people in our region or across Canada have to die before the Liberals listen to the experts and change their approach. Our bill will save lives."

In 2020 alone, the opioid crisis claimed 4,395 lives in Canada, which is equivalent to 12 deaths a day.

Higher court to hear case against man accused in Afzaal family killings (*The London Free Press*)

The case of a London man facing murder charges in the deaths of four members of a Muslim family in a deadly hit-and-run has moved to a higher court.

Nathaniel Veltman, 20, made a brief video appearance Wednesday morning from the Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre in the Ontario Court of Justice, but it was just a formality to advise the court that the case has been moved to the Superior Court of Justice through a preferred indictment.

The legal procedure allows the Crown to apply to the provincial attorney general for consent to move the case to the higher court without an accused having a preliminary hearing.

Federal prosecutor Lisa Matthews told the court that the Crown filed the preferred indictment on Jan. 20. Veltman made his first appearance in the Superior Court of Justice on Tuesday.

A judicial pretrial has been scheduled on March 8. Veltman returns to the Superior Court assignment court on April 12.

Veltman is charged with four counts of first-degree murder and one count of attempted murder for the deaths of four member of the Afzaal family, who were hit by a pickup truck while out for a late spring walk in northwest London on June 6, 2021.

Salman Afzaal, 46, his wife Madiha Salman, 44, their 15-year-old daughter

Yumna and Afzaal's mother Talat, 74, were killed at the corner of Hyde Park and South Carriage roads. Fayez Afzaal, 9, suffered serious injuries but survived.

Veltman was arrested a short time later in the Cherryhill Village Mall parking lot. At the time, the London police alleged the crash was a targeted attack on Muslims.

The deaths led to an unprecedented outpouring of support for the Muslim community both here and internationally. Prosecutors are pursuing terrorism as the basis for the first-degree murder charges.

Penetanguishene superjail staffing levels drop due to COVID-19 (Orillia Matters)

The COVID-19 outbreak at the Penetanguishene superjail seems to be showing no sign of slowing down.

"Our outbreak is ongoing," said Richard Dionne, CNCC-369 local president at the Central North Correctional Centre.

"We are currently at over 50 positive inmates and about 50 staff."

While Dionne said the number of employees who have either tested positive or are away due to close contact has ballooned since the outbreak was declared in mid-January, the number of inmates with COVID-19 appears to be dropping from a high of 120 positive cases just a couple of weeks ago.

The superjail has an inmate capacity of 1,184 while employing about 250 full-time correctional officers along with more than 100 "fixed term" (part-time) jail guards.

While Dionne said that all current PPE protocols continue to be followed, he earlier noted that the Ministry of the Solicitor General moved a number of inmates from North Bay Jail, which was struggling to control its own outbreak.

Dionne said there are definitely concerns around staffing since these kinds of situations can increase workload and frustration for staff while also increasing tension for inmates, which makes for a very difficult work environment for his members.

Andrew Morrison, a spokesman with the Solicitor General's office, earlier noted that each facility has its own pandemic plan in place prepared in consultation with local public health partners.

"Protecting the health and safety of correctional services staff and those in provincial custody is the ministry's top priority," Morrison said, pointing out the ministry has developed COVID protocols for provincial correctional facilities, in alignment with the Ministry of Health and public health partners.

"Any inmate that tests positive for COVID-19 is placed on droplet and contact precautions and isolated from the rest of the inmate population while they receive appropriate medical care," he said, noting the ministry has its

own supply of COVID-19 vaccines and makes the vaccine available to all eligible inmates on an ongoing basis.

As protests spread and other provinces lift restrictions, Ontario's Doug Ford stays the course (CBC News)

Even before any truckers started their engines to join the Ottawa-bound convoy against COVID-19 restrictions, Ontario Premier Doug Ford laid out a timeline for easing the latest round of the province's public health measures.

In the three weeks since that [timeline](#) was announced, the political situation has changed, much more so than the pandemic situation.

[Protesters in Ottawa](#) have dug in and are about to begin their third week of blocking streets in the nation's capital.

A protest is snarling [Windsor's Ambassador Bridge](#), a route that carries one-quarter of all Canada-U.S. cross-border trade.

[Police in Toronto closed streets around Queen's Park](#) on Wednesday amid rumblings that demonstrators are heading there, with plans to stay. [Alberta](#), [Saskatchewan](#), [Quebec](#) and other provinces have announced (to varying degrees) accelerated timelines for lifting COVID-19 restrictions. None of this has prompted Ford to change his plans for reopening Ontario — at least not yet.

Multiple sources close to the government tell CBC News that the Ministry of Health is preparing options for cabinet to speed up the timeline of ending existing capacity limits in indoor spaces.

Ford likely to 'stick to the plan,' adviser says

Under the [current timeline](#), Ontario is due to take its next step on Feb. 21, by lifting all capacity limits in restaurants, bars, cinemas and gyms, and allowing large spectator venues to increase attendance to 50 per cent of capacity. The remaining capacity restrictions are due to lift three weeks later, on March 14.

The sources did not provide any proposed new dates for easing restrictions, but one of Ford's senior political advisers said any changes to the timeline would not be dramatic.

"People like it when you have a plan and when you stick to the plan," the adviser said. "I don't see any upside to going in a different direction."

That's why you won't see Ford follow Alberta Premier Jason Kenney's lead and announce an immediate dropping of restrictions or a quick end to Ontario's indoor mask mandates and proof of vaccination requirements.

"We have no plans currently to drop the [vaccine] passport situation or masking. We believe that masking is going to be important for some time to come," Ontario Health Minister Christine Elliott told a news conference Wednesday.

Which brings us back to the trucker-led protests, since their many demands include ending all vaccine mandates and mask mandates, most of which fall under provincial jurisdiction.

Protests a political hot potato

There are growing calls for Ford to get more involved in bringing the protests to an end. After all, Ottawa and Windsor are in Ontario.

"I call on the government of Ontario to join us in securing an end to these illegal blockades in several Ontario cities and to apply the law," Transport Minister Omar Alghabra told a news conference Wednesday.

On Wednesday night, Ford spoke with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau about the protests, which Ford has called occupations. Yet conversations with Ford's team suggest they've been reluctant to engage with the protesters or toss Trudeau a political lifeline.

Ford and his top advisers "want to leave this to be Trudeau's problem," a source close to the premier's office told CBC. That echoes language from Candice Bergen, now interim leader of the federal Conservative Party.

An argument could be made that the protest is actually Trudeau's problem.

The protesters don't appear to care who has the jurisdiction to end vaccine passport programs and mask rules. Many of them don't even come from Ontario. If Doug Ford lifted every single COVID-19 restriction in Ontario tomorrow, would the protesters pack up and leave?

Their anger is pretty much laser focused on the prime minister. What's going on in Ottawa is as much an anti-Trudeau-government protest as it is an anti-vaccine-mandate protest. After all, convoy organizers proposed ousting his elected government.

Trudeau has clearly picked a side in regards to the protesters, calling them a fringe minority. Ford has not. While he is saying they should end their protests, he has not taken a firm stance on their demands.

A senior Ford government official questions whether the premier speaking out against the protesters' demands would accomplish anything other than inflame the situation.

"To bring the protests to an end, it goes back to the police enforcing the law. There's only so much any politician can do," the official said Thursday. "The political solution is to give [the protesters] what they want. We're not going to do that."

The official said lines of communication are open between the Ford and Trudeau governments, and both are prepared to provide police with any support they request to help end the blockades.

Border protest turns up heat on Ford

The potential economic damage to Ontario from the traffic jam at the Windsor-Detroit border crossing could ramp up the pressure on Ford.

"The ongoing illegal occupation and blockade happening in Ontario must stop. The Ambassador Bridge is one of the most vital trade corridors in our country," Ford said in a statement issued Wednesday afternoon, on the third day of the protest at the border.

"I remain confident that our police forces in Ontario, along with Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Canadian Border Services Agency, will take the appropriate steps to address the evolving situations in our cities and bring them to an end."

That doesn't sound like Ford is about to give the truckers his cell number (something he is fond of doing with many voters) to try to talk them out of their tactics.

There's pressure on Ford from multiple fronts:

pressure to respond to the broader public's genuine fatigue with COVID-19 measures;
pressure not to be seen as capitulating to the demands of protesters, whose tactics are largely unpopular;
pressure not to lift public health measures so quickly that it brings another big wave of infections.
"We want it done in a logical, methodical way," the senior adviser to Ford told me. "We want it open, but we want it to stay open."

Lifting restrictions a matter of timing

While there is a timetable for lifting capacity restrictions in indoor spaces, Ontario does not yet have a timetable for ending its proof of vaccination system or its province-wide mask mandate.

Neither will stay in place forever, so the question becomes one of timing. From the political standpoint, the more specific questions are: will they be lifted before Ontario's election on June 2, and what will happen with the infection rate as a result?

Almost exactly a year ago, Ford announced plans for lifting Ontario's stay-at-home order and phasing out restrictions. Within weeks, a new wave of COVID-19 was building, Ford was forced to announce a new round of closures, and the death toll kept rising.

As much as Ford and his PCs want to lift the mask mandate and vaccine passport, the absolute last thing they'd want would be yet another pandemic wave to hit Ontario this April, bringing hospitalizations and deaths in May, just as they're on the campaign trail trying to persuade voters to re-elect them.

Section of westbound Highway 402 remained closed Thursday morning (*Stratford Beacon Herald*)

A section of the westbound lanes of Highway 402 in Lambton County remained closed Thursday morning because of a "Freedom Convoy" protest that began the previous day, according to the province's 511 Ontario traveller information website.

The website said the notice of the closing of the westbound lanes between Nauvoo Road and Highway 21 North in Warwick Township was updated at 6 a.m.

Westbound traffic was detoured for most of Wednesday around a demonstration involving roughly 30 farm, construction and passenger vehicles, many of them flying Canadian flags, that had stopped in the westbound lanes of the highway near the Highway 21 exit ramp to Forest.

Traffic continued flowing on the westbound lanes beyond the portion closed by police and vehicles continued to make their way on the highway through Samia and Point Edward to the Blue Water Bridge crossing with Michigan.

Westbound traffic on the bridge was halted for more than eight hours Sunday by a demonstration on Highway 402 in Sarnia and Point Edward.

"We're only taking up one lane," David Buurma said Wednesday in a Facebook post from the site of the demonstration.

"We didn't push the bridge," he said. "We understand how needed that trucking is for our industry, going back and forth from the bridge."

Buurma said, "We'd just like all the mandates to be dropped. That's our goal."

In the post, Buurma said a landowner near the highway demonstration is allowing supporters to visit.

"Come and join us," Buurma said.

Lambton OPP closed the westbound section of the highway Wednesday morning.

"Lambton County OPP have implemented the closure to ensure public safety," police said in a news release Wednesday. "The OPP respects the right of everyone to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. The OPP asks everyone to be patient and respectful of each other despite potential inconvenience."

Ontario Premier Doug Ford issued a statement Wednesday about the ongoing demonstrations impacting border crossings in southwestern Ontario, including the Ambassador Bridge in Windsor.

He said he has spoke with mayors in Windsor and Sarnia "and told them the province is ready to provide any support we can offer."

Ford added, "I remain confident that our police forces in Ontario, along with Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Canadian Border Services Agency, will take the appropriate steps to address the evolving situations in our cities and bring them to an end."

International News:

Police arrest convoy protesters at New Zealand's Parliament (*The Associated Press*)

Police on Thursday arrested dozens of protesters who were camped out on the grounds of New Zealand's Parliament on the third day of a convoy protest against coronavirus mandates.

The arrests came after Parliament Speaker Trevor Mallard took the rare step of closing the grounds.

Police called in more than 100 extra officers from other parts of the country. Still, police seemed prepared to wait it out as officers formed a line and ordered people to leave but only very slowly advanced on them.

By evening, police had arrested more than 120 people and charged many of them with trespassing or obstruction. Police wore protective vests but didn't don riot gear or carry guns. Some protesters were readying to hunker down for a third night.

Police said they had told everybody on the grounds they were trespassing.

"Police have appealed repeatedly to protestors to leave the grounds and have begun evicting people from the precinct," said Superintendent Corrie Parnell, the Wellington district commander. "While police acknowledge people's right to protest, this needs to be conducted in a way that does not unfairly impact on the wider public."

The protest began Tuesday after more than 1,000 people driving cars and trucks converged on Parliament in a convoy inspired by protests in Canada and elsewhere.

The number of protesters dwindled to a couple of hundred by Thursday. Some of the protesters' vehicles remained parked in the middle of streets around Parliament, forcing some street closures. The National Library and many cafes and bars in the area closed their doors while the protest played out.

Parliament's grounds are often the site of peaceful protests, although mass campouts are unusual.

Typically at least some politicians will come out to listen to the concerns of protesters, but politicians reconvening at Parliament after a summer break appeared to be in rare unison by not acknowledging the protesters, who Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said weren't representative of New Zealanders.

Among the protesters' grievances is the requirement in New Zealand that certain workers get vaccinated against COVID-19, including teachers, doctors, nurses, police and military personnel. Many protesters also oppose mask mandates – such as those in stores and among children over about age 8 in classrooms – and champion the ideal of more "freedom."

New Zealand was spared the worst of the pandemic after it closed its borders and implemented strict lockdowns, limiting the spread of the virus. The nation has reported just 53 virus deaths among its population of 5 million.

But some have grown weary of the restrictions. Ardern last week said the country would end its quarantine requirements for incoming travellers in stages as it reopened its borders. With about 77% of New Zealanders vaccinated, Ardern has also promised she won't impose more lockdowns.

Health officials have been reporting about 200 new virus cases each day as an outbreak of the omicron variant grows. Sixteen people are currently hospitalized because of the virus.

Wellington City Council spokesperson Richard MacLean said it had not been ticketing illegally parked vehicles near Parliament due to concerns over staff safety but was considering its options to get the roads reopened in what remained a volatile situation. He said the council was advising people to avoid the area.

Global regulators going 'full steam' to tame crypto currencies (Reuters)

Regulators came late to the fast evolving cross-border world of cryptoassets but they could come up with their first global framework of rules within months, a senior official said on Wednesday.

The Financial Stability Board, which groups regulators, central banks and finance ministry officials from the G20 economies, is looking at what needs to be done with cryptoassets such as bitcoin and stablecoins.

Crypto assets are currently treated differently across the world, ranging from bans to no rules at all even though they are traded by international firms. The European Union is approving a comprehensive set of standards for authorising and supervising participants in crypto asset markets.

Robert Ophele, chair of France's markets watchdog AMF and a member of the FSB, said regulators were following the "universal basic principle" of same rules to cover the same risks.

"I do expect that for some of them, we do have international regulatory convergence... primarily stablecoins and digital asset service providers," Ophele told a webinar held by Afore Consulting.

Regulators were behind the curve because cryptoassets were not yet a threat to financial stability, but this was now top of the FSB's agenda, Ophele said.

"I do think we could achieve, deliver on these issues in the next few quarters... the FSB is going full steam on this issue," Ophele said.

The FSB has no powers to make binding rules, but its members commit to introducing its regulatory principles into their own national rulebooks.

Regulators are also trying to catch up with other parts of a rapidly digitalising financial market, such as social media and smartphones becoming more heavily used by retail investors to buy and sell shares.

EU securities watchdog ESMA is scrutinising "finfluencers" or social media influencers who give stock tips without safeguards on their credibility, its chair Verena Ross told the webinar.

"This fast moving phenomenon requires active monitoring," she said.

The EU needed a powerful watchdog for markets like the European Central Bank is for banking, Ophele said.

"The current structure is no longer fit for the purpose with the development of cross-border digital market activities," Ophele said.

Lawmakers launch 'all levels' probe into Ronald Greene death (*The Associated Press*)

Declaring "no cover-up will be tolerated," Louisiana's top GOP lawmaker announced a bipartisan legislative investigation Thursday into the deadly 2019 arrest of Black motorist Ronald Greene, an inquiry that will examine the state's response at "all levels," from troopers to the governor.

House Speaker Rep. Clay Schexnayder said he launched the probe in response to an [Associated Press report](#) last month that showed Democratic Gov. John Bel Edwards was informed within hours that troopers arresting Greene engaged in a "violent, lengthy struggle," yet he kept quiet for two years as state police told a much different story to the victim's family and in official reports: that Greene died from a crash after a high-speed chase.

"These events have raised serious questions regarding who knew what and when," Schexnayder said in a statement. "The actions taken that night and the cryptic decisions and statements made every step of the way since then have eroded public trust."

Edwards, who was in the midst of a tight reelection campaign at the time of Greene's May 2019 death near Monroe, did not speak out in detail about the case until last May, after the AP obtained and published [long-withheld body-camera video](#) showing white troopers jolting Greene with stun guns, punching him in the face and dragging him by his ankle shackles as he wailed, "I'm your brother! I'm scared! I'm scared!"

Edwards did not immediately respond to a request for comment Thursday. But at a [news conference](#) last week, he said he was unaware Greene had been mistreated until September 2020 and did not speak out about the troopers' actions — even after privately watching the footage — because of an ongoing federal civil rights investigation.

Edwards' news conference marked the first time he characterized the actions of the troopers involved in Greene's arrest as "racist." And he denied doing anything to impede or delay justice. "The implication that I knew more and tried to cover it up is simply and categorically false," he said.

Asked at the news conference about the prospect of a legislative probe, Edwards said: "I can't tell you that I welcome an investigation that is an absolute witch hunt with no basis in fact. Where would that stop?"

Schexnayder said a new investigative committee made up of four Democrats and four Republicans will begin public hearings in the coming weeks, with Edwards himself among the witnesses likely to be called. Lawmakers are also expected to request a range of documents, including text messages from Edwards that he has yet to release in response to a public records request by AP.

Edwards has denied Schexnayder's contention in the recent AP report that the governor met with him last June and sought to discourage a legislative inquiry into the case by blaming Greene's death on a car wreck.

Page Cortez, the Republican Senate president, said he was also at the meeting and recalled the governor making the argument that "nothing nefarious" happened in Greene's arrest; that Greene "ran into a tree" after a

chase; and that no criminal charges were going to be brought in the case. Cortez also backed Schexnayder's account of the governor saying there was no need for lawmakers to take action.

Cortez said recent events have made clear that lawmakers — and the public — need more information. "The legislature, as a whole, feels like we need to get more answers and be more transparent about what took place," he said.

The legislative action is playing out amid a more than 2-year-old federal civil rights probe into the deadly encounter and whether police brass obstructed justice to protect the troopers who arrested Greene.

An AP investigation found Greene's death was part of a pattern of state police violence shrouded in secrecy, and among at least a dozen cases over the past decade in which troopers or their bosses ignored or concealed evidence of beatings, deflected blame and impeded efforts to root out misconduct.

Greene's mother, Mona Hardin, has called for Edwards to resign.

"He was able to stand aside as all this unfolded and just remain mute," she told the AP. "That's shameful."

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